

USING THE THEOLOGY OF CALL
TO EMPOWER THE CHURCH
FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Lawrence E. VanHook, D. Min.

B.A., Bishop College, 1985
M. Div., Sacramento Theological Seminary, 1991

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ABSTRACT

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by

Lawrence E. VanHook
United Theological Seminary, 2001

Mentors
Paul Hertig, Ph.D.
Robert C. Lithicum, D. Min.

At Community Church for Christ of Oakland we feel that every member of our congregation has a calling on their life and God is holding them responsible for living out their call through service. Here we begin to teach and preach the call of the parishioner to enable the church to empower the people in our community for transformation. It is through this method that we have encouraged and allowed the parishioners to develop ministries in the community. If the parishioners answer their call, I believe the church will be a strong force within the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After thanking God for giving me the vision and the strength for the journey I have to thank my wife Brenda. First, I thank her for being the motivation behind this process. Second, I thank her for giving me the freedom to allow me to prepare myself for the work of ministry. Brenda has been the glue and the structure in helping me to build a solid foundation for Community Church for Christ. Out of her call to ministry service she was able to use her expertise to establish a faith-based organization for the church and has secured private, state, foundation and federal funding for this purpose. I am blessed to have by my side a woman to whom God has given so many talents. For this and more, I say “thank you.”

When I first began this journey, I was teaching at Patten College. Dr. Rebecca Skaggs, the academic dean and Dr. Kathy Fairbanks, the dean of The Degree Completion Program, were very encouraging throughout this process.

I would like to thank the Community Church for Christ family for allowing me to practice ministry within the church body and the community the church serves. I believe Community Church for Christ will become a new model for Urban Ministry because of this process. Community, you have become a lighthouse within the sea of the West Oakland community. Thank you for sharing this experience with me.

To my professional associates: Reverend Dr. Ambrose F. Carol, Reverend Dr. Lou Johnson, David McKeithen, - thank you for your help and guidance. To my context associates: Marsha Herring, Gary Dalen, Yolanda Knighten, Janice Wheelock, Bridget and Early Powell, Romal and Jenett Walker-Cook, Brenda Walker-VanHook, Monica Bell and Terry Thomas. I believe your lives have changed as a result of this program. I also believe your understanding of ministry has changed. You are now challenged to focus on God's giving passion and the gifts for ministry. Welcome to the ministry of the Twenty-first century.

To Venita Davis, a pair of eyes and ears that I needed to complete this project. As a writer and organizer you kept on pushing even when I was pushed out. I can't thank you enough for helping to close this writing process within a timely manner. May God richly bless you.

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To UTS, I thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to matriculate at your institution. You allowed God to use you to connect me with two men that I may have never otherwise come to know as my mentors. Looking back, the success of this program is due largely to those mentors. I would also like to add that the program will continue to be a success when students are linked with the right mentors.

To Paul Hertig and Robert Lithicum, my mentors, thank you. In the beginning I had my doubts and concerns and thought that there was nothing that either of you could help me with. Oh how I was so wrong. As I am lead by God in the journey of life I have to remind myself the words to one of my favorite songs, "God's got it all in control." The instruction that I have received from you both is invaluable to this ministry. Above all, I thank God for placing you in my life. Thanks.

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I am also grateful for the contributions of Kathy Neal, Robert Hulin, Bay-cities Ministries Union, Pastor Gordon A. Humphrey, and Pastor Robert McKnight.

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the second call in the parishioner's life. We believe that every child of God has a second call to service. Creation of an atmosphere whereby parishioners can begin to identify their second call will enable them to live it out.

In Chapter 1, the plight of the poor of our community is addressed. It is our responsibility as Christians to tend to the needs of the economically disadvantaged. Using the biblical story of Moses, the writer teaches the parishioners how to identify their second call to service in order to be a light in the community to those in need of help.

Describing other successful models of ministries, Chapter 2 supports the premise that it is the responsibility of the church to provide various forums for parishioners to develop their passions and also contends that partnership and collaboration with other community churches and organizations are necessary for a successful ministry.

Chapter 3 discusses the absence of church participation in uplifting the African-American community and the overall circumstance that parishioners are no longer involved in community service. In reaction, two types of call, Prophetic and Situational, are identified, defined and their value examined.

In Chapter 4 we begin to parallel the life of Moses and our own lives, to determine the areas of our lives through which God is seeking to use us. We use a five-step approach to aid in the goal of making use of second call to begin to form our ministry groups.

Chapter 5 examines the topics covered in the study course and how parishioners can be of value to the 21st Century church. Groups have formed and community action undertaken based on newly discovered second calls to service.

Chapter 6 explains how formal training has helped me to define the word Theology. Through this program of study, I have formed a much broader view of theology than that which was understood through earlier, more traditional teachings. My belief that churches should encourage parishioners to live out the plan God has established for their lives is strengthened.

As a result of using this method, I have come to believe that the 21st Century church must have a multi-ministry of service. These ministries must be able to meet the people no matter where they are. I also believe this will help set a new paradigm for a thriving ministry for the up and coming generations.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

As agents of Christ, our call is to empower the poor. This call is not just the responsibility of ministers. The responsibility to answer our call extends to all people. Jesus clearly gives us model after model of how we are to deal with the people we serve. In *Empowering The Poor*, the author, Dr. Robert C. Linthicum, Executive Director of Partners in Urban Transformation, states:

The poor are a vast populace within the cities of the world. By the close of this century, more than twenty percent of all the people on the face of the earth will be the urban poor. One out of every five human beings will live in cities and be profoundly poor. And half of them will be children.¹

The author is the pastor at Community Church for Christ, which is located in an economically depressed, urban area of Oakland, California. Serving in this area, which reflects the characteristics of the environment spoken of in Dr. Linthicum's book, responds to Jesus' call to empower the poor.

You may ask why help the poor? Are they not capable of helping themselves? Let them pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. The Bible clearly tells us that the poor will always be with us. Jesus spent most of his ministry meeting the needs of the poor. In one of Jesus' most famous sermons found in the gospel of Luke, Jesus takes the time to detail what we now refer to as the Beatitudes.

¹ Robert C. Linthicum, *Empowering The Poor* (California: MARC, 1991), 6.

Looking at his disciples, He said:
 Blessed are you who are poor,
 for yours is the Kingdom of God.
 Blessed are you who hunger now,
 for you will be satisfied.
 Blessed are you who weep now,
 for you will laugh.
 Blessed are you when men hate you,
 When they exclude and insult you and reject your name as evil,
 because of the Son of Man.
 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward
 in heaven,
 for that is how their fathers treated the prophets.
 But woe to you who are rich,
 for you have already received your comfort.
 Woe to you who are well fed now,
 for you will go hungry.
 Woe to you who laugh now,
 for you will mourn and weep.
 Woe to you when all men speak well of you,
 for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.²

Jesus' words describe people whom the world deems to be surplus, nuisances,
 pitiful and eyesores. These are the very people to whom Jesus would have us show
 compassion and love. These "undesirables" are God's creations. They are God's concern,
 just as we are God's concern. God has entrusted us, those who have heard his call, to
 work for his glory and to mobilize ourselves to action.

As G. Willis Bennett acknowledges in his book, *Effective Urban Church
 Ministry*:

For about thirty years at least, local congregations, denominations,
 and interfaith groups have been accelerating the search for new
 forms of ministry. Renewal efforts have been made to reexamine
 the ministry of the church in the light of the ministry of Jesus and
 his instruction to the church. The theology of servanthood has been
 recovered. More and more Christians are coming to recognize that
 every human concern is a concern of God and ought to become a
 concern for his church. Spurred on by this theology, the church has

² Luke 6:20-26 New International Version Bible (NIV)

expanded its ministry to engulf a much larger segment of life and to find ways of relating receptively in the world to persons and groups too long neglected.³

God has set a blazing desire within this author to focus his ministry on the residents of this distressed urban neighborhood in Oakland, California for they are worthy to be blessed.

The West Oakland area suffers from poverty and is burdened with prostitution, homicide, crime and drug use in staggering numbers. It appears that the area, within the last twenty years, has been abandoned. For example, according to the Oakland Police Department's Crime Analysis Section, Area 1X Beat 6X and 7X, whose perimeters span five blocks of the West Oakland area, have had over 301 parolees released into this area. This number represents ten times the number of parolees released into any two other areas of the city combined.⁴ The area is a prime location for community organizers willing and ready to meet the challenges of its people. See Appendix A for community crime statistics.

"It is almost impossible to plan for effective church ministry unless one has an awareness of the social setting in which that ministry is to be performed."⁵ To get a clearer picture of the condition of the people in the area, this author gave consideration to how the residents saw their own plight. What do the residents think of their surroundings? Do they feel hopeless? Do they see a brighter future for themselves and or their community? To answer these questions and more, interviews were conducted of

³ G. Willis Bennett, *Guidelines for Effective Urban Church Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 64.

⁴ Statistics provided by the Oakland Police Department, Crime Analysis Division (Appendix A).

⁵ G. Willis Bennett, *Effective Urban Church Ministry*, 22.

residents, community organization staff, and clergy members. Statistics concerning the state of affairs of this entire community were also secured from the local police department and are found in Appendix A herein.

Community Church for Christ members, along with the pastor, conducted interviews with people in the West Oakland area, questioning why they live in this area, and whether it is by choice or circumstance. One woman stated, “There is always something to do in the city.” Another resident said, “Oakland sets the pace for the rest of the world.” A man in his 50’s told us, “This is where the jobs are.” A homeless man stated that he came to Oakland because there were more programs servicing the poor.⁶

Given the conditions of poverty, homicide, drugs prostitution and other crimes in this area, why do people still choose to live here? Dr. Robert C. Linthicum states that,

People move to the city both because they are ‘pushed’ out of the rural and village areas, and because they are ‘pulled’ by a city’s allure. They are pushed into the city because of rural disasters, country blues, landlessness and urban ideology. Disasters such as wars, floods and crop failure force people into refugee camps which are often on the outskirts of major cities. Governments tend to support city-based industries while ignoring rural needs. Consequently, young people see better opportunities for education and advancement in the cities. . . As well, they are pulled by at least four major forces: freedom, bright lights, work and better living conditions.⁷

We asked residents what they really dislike about West Oakland. The comments reflected a common thread. One female senior citizen who lives next door to Community Church commented, “The crime, violence and prostitution in this area are constantly getting worse.” Another stated, “The poor and homeless are my biggest dislikes about

⁶ Community Church for Christ Context Analysis Team Interviews (California, 2000).

⁷ Robert C. Linthicum, *Empowering The Poor*, 9.

West Oakland.” Others addressed the problem of an insufficient number of jobs available in the city, which is a direct contrast to a statement made by another interviewee. Many stories were told about the problems and struggles of those residing in the West Oakland area.

One of the local clergymen interviewed was Reverend Ken Chambers. Reverend Chambers is Director of the West Side Development Corporation and pastor of the West Side Baptist Church of Oakland. He was a leading force in bringing a full-service grocery store to the West Oakland area. This action was initiated as a reaction to the numerous liquor stores that are easily found on many street corners. There had not been a grocery store servicing the area in twelve years. Reverend Chambers sees a ray of hope for the West Oakland area residents in spite of the sense of hopelessness that the residents exhibit on a regular basis. He says, “If we could just bring people together we could take Oakland back.”⁸

Another local innovative church leader, Ray Mitchell, pastor of the Market Street Seventh Day Adventist Church of West Oakland was also interviewed. Pastor Mitchell was the driving force behind his church’s purchase of five homes previously used as drug houses. These houses had been shut down by the City of Oakland. Pastor Mitchell, a new pastor of the church says, “It is time for us to take a stand in the community. This church is now seventy-six years old, and in it’s history of existence, has never taken a stand to help. We hope to build housing for the displaced seniors in and around this community.”⁹

⁸ Ken Chambers, interviewed by author, Oakland, California, January 2000.

⁹ Ray Mitchell, interviewed by author, Oakland, California, January 2000.

Pastor Mitchell comes from a background full of drugs and crime. He is a living model of what people from such a background can do with their lives.

Community Church for Christ of Oakland is a small church, just fifteen months old. It sits on the west side of Oakland in an area that appears to have been abandoned by law and order. It is located on the corner of 33rd Street and San Pablo Avenue in a neighborhood where homelessness, prostitution, drugs and crime have taken over the streets. This church believes that our challenge as a church is to hear the needs of this community and then respond to the call.

Traditionally, the call has been considered to be limited to the profession of pastor and to pastoral staff. Specifically, the minister must be called upon by God to be a minister. However, the contention of this paper is that every person has a calling in his or her life and God is holding each person responsible for identifying and acting on that call. One primary objective at Community Church for Christ is to create an atmosphere in the church where each parishioner can hear and answer his or her call to service. If the parishioners hear the call and then answer the call, the church will be able to empower both those parishioners and the people in the community for change and transformation.

We are using a five-step approach with the members of Community Church for Christ to equip them to serve the community and use community organizing to get into the hearts and minds of the people to be served.

The five steps are:

Step 1: One on Ones

Step 2: Sermons

Step 3: Course Study

Step 4: Convention

Step 5: Mission Covenant Groups

We will use the *Action Research Planner*'s research spiral model and method (Act, Plan, Observe, and Reflect).¹⁰

As a little boy, I was fascinated with the people in the Bible and the way in which God used them. I remember acting out the roles of characters in the Bible as I listened to the Sunday school stories. Most importantly, I observed that God always used people to carry out His miraculous tasks. As a boy, one of my favorite biblical characters was Moses. Moses stood against all odds in Egypt telling Pharaoh "Let my people go."¹¹ Another of my favorite characters was David, the little shepherd boy, who was not afraid of the Philistine giant Goliath. When all of King Saul's soldiers ran out of courage, David offered to fight for the sake of his people.¹² There were other biblical characters who would not bow down to public pressure. Amongst these courageous characters was Daniel who was placed in a den of lions because he would not surrender to peer pressure and deny the God of his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹³ Others include the three Hebrew boys who were thrown into the fiery furnace.¹⁴ All of the biblical characters mentioned, as well as others, had calls. Nothing and no one could turn them around. Intriguingly, none of them were clergy!

¹⁰ Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, *The Action Research Planner*, 3rd ed. (Victoria: Deacon University Press, 1988), 14.

¹¹ Exodus 5:1 (NIV)

¹² I Samuel 17 (NIV)

¹³ Daniel 6 (NIV)

¹⁴ Daniel 3 (NIV)

God always knew the right person to choose and used them in physical and spiritual warfare, exemplifying his miraculous powers.

My life has been full of events that surround the call, test my compassion for people and place me squarely against the odds. However, something inside made me respond with compassion at a very early age. As I reflect on my life, I remember the times when I have had to stand against the odds. I remember a little girl in my first grade class who was teased by the other kids because she was mentally challenged. One day she had no place to sit, so I stood up and gave her my seat. As I have grown, this feeling of compassion has become a way of life for me. I cannot hide from God's calling. I, like those biblical characters that so fascinated me as a child, have accepted the call into the ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

The ministry and mission of Community Church for Christ directs us to go out into the streets and share the good news of Christ in word, deed and liberating power, as well as provide an environment that meets the spiritual needs of those who already constitute the church body. Our primary goal is to enlist our members in a drive to share their gifts in order to equip others in the church to spread this work and empower the disenfranchised in the neighborhood we serve for Christ. The overriding objective is to see improvement in the lives of all whom we touch and our greater reward is to witness the progress made as a result of our joint faith and efforts as a church. To God be the glory.

Within the last decade, several churches have tried to answer the call and cry of the inner city. Where the inner city was once filled with people who had family values and a general concern for mutual welfare, it has now become a cesspool for drugs, gangs, crime and lawlessness. All of the major chain stores have left this community. The banks and insurance companies have redlined the areas. Schoolteachers are not spending their time educating children; instead they have become behavior management specialists. Police officers are shooting first and asking questions later. Tax dollars are spent building more prisons instead of more hope in our distressed communities. Who will dare answer the call? It is the church's responsibility to do so.

Encouraging models of community service ministry can be found throughout the United States. Two such church ministry models with great impact on the communities they serve can be found in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area: Oakland's Allen Temple Baptist Church and San Francisco's Glide Memorial United Methodist Church.

Allen Temple, lead by its pastor Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith Sr., has been a model for ministry across the entire country. Pastor Smith, born in Kansas City in 1931, was educated in Kansas City schools and Western Baptist College. He received his B.D. degree in 1959 from the School of Religion, University of Missouri, and a Th.M. from the same institution in 1966, majoring in Church and Community. In 1972 he received a Th.M. in Church History from the American Baptist Seminary of the West and later earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in 1975.¹⁵ Allen Temple has established four senior housing complexes, a credit union, family life center, and job development-training center. Pastor Smith and his church have formed a partnership with Patten College and the American Baptist Seminary of the West to start a Leadership Institute within the community. In this Leadership Institute, Pastor Smith presents a Christian based curriculum to help other pastors and parishioners use educational tools to aid people in the community who have not been able to attend school. Under the leadership of Pastor Smith, Allen Temple has grown in membership to over 3,000 over the past 30 years. Pastor Smith pleads for a church that will be "the visible manifestation of the invisible Christ" and will accept a "servant-church theology".¹⁶

¹⁵ Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., "Senior Pastor" (2001). Available [Online] <<http://www.allen-temple.org/pastor/drjassr.html>> [2001].

¹⁶ Ibid.

Pastor Smith places continued stress upon the servant role of the church in his preaching, teaching, and example. He says,

Jesus gives you not a title but a towel... The world is where the mission of the local church must take place; this world of hurt where healing is needed; this world where hope is needed; this world where the scales of justice must be balanced; this world where sexism, racism, classism, and all 'evilisms' strive to destroy human life; this is the world God loves and it is the place of mission for the local church.¹⁷

Surely in church positions, consideration of one's call and where they can best be used for God should be objects of prayer and concern.

In an interview with the author in Oakland, CA on July 7, 2001, Pastor Smith, stated,

You have to remember trying to do ministry in California is not easy to do. Most of the black people in California have families that come from the south, meaning Texas, Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Mississippi. California is not Jerusalem, it's Babylon. In Babylon every now and then God raises up somebody to be a voice for His people.

Realizing that neither pastor nor staff of trained ministers would have the individual where with all to accomplish every task that is required in outreach ministry and witness, Allen Temple Church established an Evangelism Committee. The purpose of the committee is to lead the church in an expansion of its evangelism through initiatives such as evangelistic "street" ministries, letters and literature to those who visit the church services, the Tract Racks supplied with literature, a course in Prison Ministry Training and neighborhood Bible studies. Training lay people to function both in evangelism and ministry has proven effective. As a result, many people come to Allen

¹⁷ Ibid.

Temple because some person from the church has encountered them through a direct appeal or ministry.

Allen Temple has an undeniable momentum that continues to build. Four members who had recently joined the church all agreed that they didn't join to sit and observe, but to participate. And while not every member of Allen Temple is active in Christian service, it continues to be a goal that permeates much of what the church does. Pastor Smith considers himself to be a player coach. He wants to encourage shared responsibility. He has demonstrated that there are more people with the call to ministry than just the pastor.

Bennett writes, "Of all the churches I know in more than twenty states where I have been, I have not found another where so many people give so generously of themselves and with such joy. Persons give evidence of their personal and professional growth and of their deepened sense of spirituality."¹⁸

Pastor Smith has equipped the Church and himself with many tools to aid in his endeavors. He has lectured at a number of domestic and international institutions. He is a former president of the 1.8 million-member Progressive National Baptist Church, and a former member of both the Oakland Board of Convention and Oakland Board of Education. Pastor Smith has received over 225 awards, which include more than 100 awards for leadership in the African American community. Pastor Smith has authored sixteen books. Recent publications include: *Giving To A Giving God*, *Basic Bible Sermons*, a chapter in *From Prison Cell to Church Pew* and a sermon in *Best Sermons for 1993*.

¹⁸ G. Willis Bennett, *Effective Urban Church Ministry*, 135-136.

Allen Temple Church continues to appeal to people who live nearby, while still reaching out to a larger community. The appeal comes through the wide variety of ministries provided, and to the worship services that are theologically and culturally relevant to the growing congregation.

Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, where Reverend Cecil Williams is the pastor, has a ministry in the heart of downtown San Francisco, also known as the Tenderloin area – San Francisco’s meanest neighborhood. The church has assessed the problems of its inner city community; it has recognized the needs of its people and it has continued to strive to meet those needs.¹⁹ Glide is well known for its spirit of helping the poor. Glide members and other community volunteers are recognized throughout the Bay area for their activities to feed the homeless and provide them with shelter. In response to the astronomical housing costs in San Francisco, Reverend Williams and his church have built low cost housing units for first-time homebuyers. It should be noted that Glide has one of the most culturally diverse congregations in California. Word of their work has reached notable figures, such as Oprah Winfrey, who donated \$10,000 in support of Glide’s mission.

“Glide approaches people from the place of community, rather than as an institution,” says Ezra Earl Jones, former general secretary of the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church. “It pays attention to people in the context of their lives, rather than in the context of the church.”²⁰ Glide is San Francisco’s largest private provider of social services. This church has made a commitment to address every

¹⁹ Ibid, 22.

²⁰ Rekha Balu, “Reverence for Radicals,” *Fast Company Magazine* (June 2001): 48.

aspect of human dignity and survival such as the basic needs of food and shelter, education and employment, to physical, mental, and spiritual empowerment.

A strong force behind Glide's successful ministry is Janice Mirikitani, wife of Reverend Cecil Williams. Ms. Mirikitani, a poet laureate and dancer, has hit full stride as Executive Director of Glide's 42 community outreach programs, an \$11 million nonprofit organization that helps residents in San Francisco's most economically crippled areas. The Glide Family, Youth, and Child Care Building is named after her.

Glide is now involved in a pilot program with five churches across the country to focus on boosting memberships and addressing community needs, and another 25 churches are on the waiting list.²¹

The story, Glide officials say, is in the numbers. While nationwide United Methodist membership has slid from 11 million to 9 million in the last two decades, Glide's rolls have increased. Membership at Glide has soared from 5,500 to roughly 10,000 in the past five years.²²

Williams once preached a sermon about the birth of Jesus, in which he states:

I'm not a literalist, is there a virgin birth? I'm not interested in facts, I'm interested in truths. And the truth is that there is hope when you go to the manger. Hope for the poor takes place. Hope for the sick takes place. Hope for those who are drugged out. Hope for those who are afraid. Hope for those who are arrogant. Hope for the hustler. I want you to know this morning that this is Bethlehem! The rejected are here. The wretched of the earth are here. Poor folks, rich folks, middle-class folks, no-class folks. You can be yourself here. You don't have to run from yourself here.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Annie Nakao, "'Radical' Glide suddenly a model for United Methodists", The San Francisco Examiner, June 30, 2000, page A-1.

You don't have to put yourself down here. You can embrace love here. Where is hope? Hope is here!²³

Another effective inner city model of ministry is The Church of The Saviour, founded in 1947, by Gordon Cosby. Elizabeth O'Connor states in her book *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures*, "It is not strange that Gordon Cosby has become the minister of a church whose unwritten covenant is that we will be enablers of each other in the telling of our stories."²⁴

Cosby was serving a congregation outside of Washington, DC when he was enlisted in the army and was sent to Europe and served as an Army Chaplain during World War II. He began to work with concepts of ministry that were to be built upon, deepened and refined over all the years to come.

Cosby writes in his book, *By Grace Transformed*,

One incident I recall took place in England. One night a young man came into my chaplain's office. He was from the same company as that of a man whom I had recently baptized. I asked, 'How is so-and-so getting along in his Christian life?' He asked me what I meant, and I said, 'Just what I said, how is so-and-so getting along in his Christian life?' He replied, 'I don't know what you mean.' So I said to him, 'Well just a week or so ago, after several conferences with him concerning the meaning of Christian life, I baptized him. I would like to know what progress he is making, what sort of witness he is making in his company.' This young man, a faithful Christian and a good friend, put his head back and started laughing. He said, 'If so-and-so is a Christian, no one in the company knows it!' . . . Something snapped within my soul that night, and I began to ask myself the question, "What am I doing? If I'm having conferences with these men, if I am baptizing

²³ *Life Magazine*, April 1997.

²⁴ Elizabeth O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures* (Washington D.C.: The Servant Leadership School, 1991) 8.

them into the Christian faith and the people in the company cannot tell the difference, what am I doing?²⁵

Upon Cosby's return to the United States in 1947, he founded the Church of Our Saviour in Washington, DC as an independent church with a strong emphasis on commitment to spiritual growth, considered the inward journey, and mission, which is the outward journey. As many churches adopted small groups for Bible study and fellowship during the 1970s, The Church of Our Saviour asked for more commitment and required every member to be in a mission group. Rather than grow larger and more centralized, Cosby's vision was to stay small and poor. In 1976, six small churches formed around individual issues Jubilee addressed housing; Seeker focused on children; Potter's House was committed to hospitality; 8th Day advocated polyculturalism; Dunamis was involved with public policy; and, Dayspring concentrated on retreat.²⁶

Cosby also formed Christian Vocation classes, to teach that there is no way to be a church except by the call of Christ, and that there were a number of dimensions to this call. These dimensions included: first, a relationship with God as intimate as the one Christ knew; second, a joining with others who are responding to the same call to have a shared life and bring a new community into existence; third, inward development – a call to change, to overcome the obstacles which hold us back and keep us from growing into the full stature of Christ - the call of Christ was to die to the old self in order to become the new creation; and, fourth, the call to move out – to discover where we were to lay

²⁵ N. Gordon Cosby, *By Grace Transformed* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) 3.

²⁶ Elizabeth O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures*, 22.

down our lives – to take up the stance of the suffering servant, and make witness to the power of Jesus Christ’s work in us.

Cosby would later tell the moderators of newly formed mission groups, “A time comes in the life of every group when it loses sight of its goals and must choose them again. Your job will be to sound again the call, to be the bearer of the vision – articulating it in your own life and helping others to see it.”²⁷ In the last 20 years Dunamis ceased functioning and five more churches were born out of a call to new missions: 1. New Community, renewing the community surrounding the church; 2. Christ House, committed to healthcare for the homeless; Lazarus House, supporting post-AA recovery; Festival Church, the Servant Leadership School; and, Church of the Servant Jesus.

In his *Handbook for Mission Groups*, Gordon Cosby describes the nuts and bolts of groups that endeavor to be agents of change in the lives of their members and agents of social change in the world. Cosby helped to form all of the mission groups within The Church of Our Saviour, although he belonged only to one. He was sometimes advised that his ministry would be increased if he divided his time equally among all the groups. Cosby believed too passionately that strong leadership existed within all the groups, so he made himself available to these groups as a guide and counselor. No doubt Gordon Cosby would agree that the greatest gift is to see the progress made as a result of our joint faith and efforts as a church.

The video by Bruce Bugbee and Associates, “The Right People in the Right Places for the Right Reasons”,²⁸ discusses Galatians 5:13 “You, my brothers, were called

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The Right People in the Right Places for the Right Reasons*, directed by Bruce Bugbee, 8 min., Network Ministries, 1998, videocassette.

to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”²⁹ Recognizing that through love, we serve one another, call to service is mandated by God. If we love God we must serve our fellow man.

Bugbee gives a clear framework for what we should be doing. First, we need to get an understanding of the picture that God is putting before us. He states that too many Christians are spending time getting more education on the teachings of the Bible rather than serving. They spend more time getting equipped to serve but never serve. Bugbee states that you must find your passion, and place that with your own spiritual gifts that are found in 1 Corinthians, with your own style. Passion is a piece of God’s heart that is given to you. Simply that is a second call, which is a Prophetic or Situation call, which could be put in place to deal with your own passion.

Your passion is your second call, a prophetic or situational call that is discovered by looking at: What keeps you up at night? What scene on TV or in the streets grieves your heart? Does it concern you to see mothers on drugs, men on alcohol, or single-parent hood? What grieves your heart? What hurts you so bad that you want to do something about it?

Bugbee also shares that if you don’t have a drive, you can use all the spiritual gifts that you have but you still won’t have anything that will drive you into the gifts that you have that will work in the area of service. Passion dictates the framework for your spiritual gifts. If more ministries would try to put into service the right people for the right reasons, the church according to the Bible will grow.

²⁹ Galatians 5:13 (NIV)

In his book, *Urban Churches – Vital Signs*, Nile Harper describes 28 church models taken from several major cities throughout the country.³⁰ The Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, Maryland was a most endearing model. Reverend Dr. Curtis Jones, the pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, speaks about his three-step plan for a church's effectiveness. He details the need for: 1) education in the church and community; 2) economic development, especially housing; and, 3) church based community organizing. Dr. Jones was able to truly impact the community it served after implementing the three-step method to approach the community's needs.³¹

Reverend Otis Moss, Jr., pastor of The Olivet Institutional Baptist Church of Cleveland Ohio, aided the inner city communities in his area with a rather unique ministry. He noted that thousands of people were walking around the city without adequate medical insurance. Under the leadership of Dr. Moss, Olivet has successfully built a medical center in Cleveland. Dr. Moss has partnered with medical practitioners, pastors and scholars in the area, who were willing to assist in the ministry to make a difference in the community in which they serve.

Harper further notes that some ministries dealt with affordable housing while others felt the need to focus on educating the youth, and still others focused on substance abuse programs, childcare and other critical issues. The models that have the greatest impact are those using collaborative efforts.

I feel, in the twenty-first century, the only way to make a shattering impact on the inner city is through partnership and collaboration.

³⁰ Nile Harper, *Urban Churches Vital Signs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ederman's Publishing Company, 1999), XV.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Lack of active African-American church participation in our depressed neighborhoods is a substantial missing component in the efforts to improve the depressed state of our communities. Historically the church was a center of community support where people were educated, equipped, and encouraged. Now it has become a place where one can hide from the cares of the world. The church is no longer a school for discipleship, a place where Christians are encouraged to articulate their call and become educated and equipped to carry out their call in the world.

In a sermon preached by Dr. E. V. Hill, pastor of The Mount Zion Baptist Church, Los Angeles CA, he referred to the Black Church as "... the only thing Negroes have to claim as their own." This begs the question: Why has the Black Church been absent and silent in our communities?

The answer to the question can be found within the call of the parishioner. The late Bishop of Chichester, G. D. A. Bell wrote in the foreword of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."³² In the words of Jesus, "If any one will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me,"³³ Jesus knew what it was going to take from us to follow Him.

³² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 7.

³³ Matthew 16:24 (NIV)

What is the cost of discipleship? In Luke 14:26-27 we find, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”³⁴ In this passage we understand the word hate to mean to love less than Jesus.

In a sermon preached by Dr. M. T. Thompson, pastor of the Mount Zion Church in Berkeley CA, insight was shared into what he feels comprises the church body today. He stated, “The church is not only a hospital for those who are spiritually sick, but also a health facility to those who need to stay in shape spiritually.”³⁵

Here at the Community Church for Christ we began exploring the concept of parishioner’s call with ongoing classes and sermons on the call. Inspiration comes from the gospel of Romans where we learn that:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.³⁶

The Community Church for Christ responds to the call of God by first serving the community in which we are located.

I recall once hearing, “No passengers – everyone is a member of the crew.” Answering our second call could very well be the key to actualizing this statement. Most people will agree that the first call is to come unto Christ. However, most of the

³⁴ Luke 14:26-27 (NIV)

³⁵ Sermon preached by Dr. M. T. Thompson (Berkeley, California: 2001)

³⁶ Romans 12 6-8 (NIV)

parishioners in our local African-American churches never hear their second call to service. This is true of African-American churches across the United States.

There is a difference between hearing God's voice and hearing God's word. When we hear God's voice He calls us to come unto Him, He gets our attention. When we hear God's word we are receiving his instruction on what we are to do to compassionately serve our fellow men and women. Luke 4:18-19 elaborates that Jesus set sail on being about his father's business. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."³⁷

In most African-American churches there is no place for ministry outside the pastor and his or her staff. The fact is, the pastor cannot meet the needs of the church and the community with a narrow focus, limited thinking, and the physical and mental abilities of only one person. To expand the definition of call means expanding the focus, direction, thinking, knowledge and skill base that the church requires to effectively carry out the task of service. All Christians are called to ministry even though not all are called upon to pulpit preaching. Preaching is just one part of the ministry.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to think.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the

³⁷ Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.³⁸

For our purposes at Community Church for Christ, the two distinct areas of the second call that we will explore here are the Prophetic Call and the Situational Call.

The Prophetic Call comes from God, and requires one to speak truth into people's lives whether they like it or not. The Bible speaks of several individuals and their prophetic call, for instance, Jeremiah, Amos, Jonah, and Moses. Looking at the life of Jesus we learn that Jesus did not carry out the task of his heavenly father's business alone. We also learn that of his twelve disciples, none were ordained priests, nor was Jesus. Jesus was a carpenter; Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen; Matthew was a tax collector; Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, Judas (not Iscariot), Simon and Judas Iscariot's to our knowledge their occupations are unknown.³⁹

More recent examples of men with the Prophetic Call are Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:12-25 (NIV)

³⁹ Research provided by Dr. Robert C. Lithicum, September 2001

The Situational Call is one that comes from one's own experiences. One person could have been homeless at one time in the past, and as a result works to make sure that homeless people have shelter. Perhaps someone grew up without a father and remembers that pain, so that individual starts a big brother program. There are so many people who find themselves faced with the question, 'What am I going to do about this situation?'

MADD is an acronym that stands for Mothers Against Drunk Drivers⁴⁰. MADD was founded by a small group of California women in 1980 after a thirteen-year-old girl lost her life as the victim of a hit-and-run drunk driver. Mothers Against Drunk Driving is a 501(c)(3) non-profit grass roots organization with more than 600 chapters nationwide. MADD is not a crusade against alcohol consumption. Its focus is to look for effective solutions to the drunk driving and underage drinking problems, while supporting those who have already experienced the pain of these senseless crimes. MADD's National President is the mother of the aforementioned thirteen-year-old girl who was killed. Inspired by her own situation, she was able to start a national campaign to promote legislation establishing tougher penalties for people driving under the influence of alcohol. Her call was situational.

The Bible proves that more lay-people were called to service than priests. The only prophet in the Bible who was also an ordained priest was Zechariah; all the rest were lay-people. Also, note that not one of the disciples was a priest.

In most African-American churches the parishioners wait until their pastor hears a call from God. In my opinion, the result of this model of ministry, that has more idle people, sets the church on a path to turn inward upon itself. Traditionally these churches

⁴⁰ "About Us". Available [Online] < <http://www.madd.org/madd/home/> > [2001].

become places where the parishioners are not challenged to service. They attend church only to stay informed of other people's business, watch a fashion show, and attend a museum-like place where the primary objective is to go, look and observe. I feel the new twenty-first century church needs to become a thermostat rather than a thermometer. The climate should be set by the parishioners and not just monitored by them. The parishioners need to realize that they have a call from God to serve, and that it is their obligation to do so. The church has become just a thermometer because there is no agitation due to the lack of an effective agitator. Therefore, this writer believes that creating an atmosphere within our local church around call will empower the parishioners for community action.

When the parishioners acknowledge the existence of their second call to commitment and service, they can support restoration of that which was once a thriving community. Through ministries they will help meet the needs of the homeless by providing food and shelter. They will help meet the needs of prostitutes by restoring self-esteem. They will help meet the needs of drug addicts and drug pushers by developing rehabilitation programs and skill-building programs for gaining employment.

Collaboration with city, county and state agencies will be developed. Funding for community-based services will be solicited. Identifying and developing spiritual gifts using call will be a vehicle for self-development and community uplifting.

The visions for the future of Community Church for Christ are based on the solid foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ and his works through biblical practices and beliefs. The Lord Jesus Christ will use this ministry to provide the congregation with strong leadership skills through a holistic approach to ministry that encompasses the

spiritual, social, mental and physical. As this ministry moves forward, parishioners will lean on the Holy Spirit for guidance in meeting both short-term and long-term goals.

Short-term goals are to establish love and trust among the members of Community Church for Christ and the surrounding community; maintain an atmosphere of unity, love and kindness; increase the church's membership by inviting others to worship Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and, to grow spiritually. Evangelizing within the local community will be critical. The use of media such as television broadcasts, newspaper articles and radio announcements will be explored. The church will inspire all of God's children to build personal relationships and commitments with Jesus Christ. People will feel welcomed and enveloped with a genuine spirit of love and concern.

Long-term goals are to expand upon the theme, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."⁴¹ Through Christian education, Dr. Dorothy Holloman, an undergraduate professor at Bishop College, Dallas TX, would always say that a simple definition of Christian education is the total sum of all experiences. Ideally, Community Church for Christ's ministry will extend beyond the four walls of the church building. The vision is to serve the community by providing outreach ministries such as a medical resource center, family life center, credit union, K-12 education facility, and childcare/latchkey program.

The most important underlying goal is to glorify God. The church strives to be a greater influence in this community, the City of Oakland, and the world, as a direct result

⁴¹ Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

of aiding God's people in the inner city. The church will once again become a place that meets the needs of the community it serves. It will be a beacon in the community. It will further the cause of Christ by feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and clothing the naked.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

A nine-week series of sermons and lessons was chosen using Moses as a model to create an atmosphere for one to accept their call. We felt that nine weeks of preaching and teaching would be sufficient to look at the life of Moses. Most of the class participants only knew the story of Moses in fragments. They knew Moses as the lawgiver of the Ten Commandments, the guy whose famous slogan was “Let my people go”. They also related Moses to the ten plagues and crossing the Red Sea on dry land. However, they have never taken an in-depth look at Moses’ whole life. Most of them could only refer to the movie directed by Cecil B. DeMille, *The Ten Commandments*. Moses clearly gives a roadmap in relation to people of vocation. If we are able to investigate the joys, pains, the ups, downs, the passion and the gifts of Moses as a model we should be able to make some parallels in relation to our own lives.

I think Moses will help us to discover our passion, our gifts and our style, if we are able to parallel our lives to his. Once I overheard the question asked, “When I die, did it matter if I was ever born?” In examining the life of Moses, from the circumstances out of his birth to his triumph of leading the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and to the East gate of the Promised Land in the wilderness, a complete picture is provided of how God uses us to empower his people. I will also be using some of Dr Robert

Lithicum's research entitled "Principles of Vocation, Moses as our Model", as a guideline to build a case.

Because of the small size of our church, we began with 15 participants and ended with ten actually completing this project. Our class size each Thursday night ranged from 11 to 20 students. We drafted volunteers to become case studies in this model. A few months prior to this project I had been preaching around the call to service. We had been advocating answering one's call.

In the first session we began to ask the question, who knows what their specific call to ministry is? Some of the answers were very superficial. "God has called me to usher", or some said God called them to sing in the choir, others maintained that God called them to be a deacon. The fact that most did not understand the power of call provided an opportunity to use the Moses model to investigate the process by which God uses us to promote His will to serve others. From this project we want people to discover to what ministry God is calling them, what calls He wants them to champion, which people are we to empower, and to whom should we preach?

During the process of the methodology, as a group we discussed how one answers their second call. Most of the group did not know of a second call, let alone how they would answer it. So, we were able to establish the groundwork by focusing on the story of Moses and how it parallels to the story of one's own life journey. Everybody should be looking for the areas in which God is speaking to him or her or through their life experiences.

For the purposes of this project, participants who finished the course are identified as Subjects 1 – 10. There were seven females, and three males in the course. Participant

ages ranged from 33-50. Incomes averaged \$10,000 - \$50,000 in the SF Bay Area.

Educational levels ranged from high school diploma to Masters Degree.

As identified in Chapter One, a Five-Step approach was used to equip the members to serve in the community.

One on Ones

One on Ones started when this group was formed. The purpose of the first One on One was to interview the people within the core group to get an understanding of their personal awareness of their second call and how it would be manifested in the surrounding community. The purpose of the second One on One was to get an update of clarity on how the second call is developed and focused around one's passion. The third and final One on One was designed to help focus on how the individual would live out their second call to ministry through service. The core group then went out into the community to do One on Ones with local residents and assessed their needs through discovery and recounting of shared joys and pains.

It is the contention of this paper that One on Ones are very important as a part of organizing an approach to solving needs within the community. In community organizing, One on Ones is the first step towards building a relationship with the person whom you are willing to serve. One on Ones helps to establish where a person is and what it is they would like to do. One on Ones help to discover a person's base of knowledge. One on Ones provide a point of reference to get started. The knowledge of the community that a person gains from One on Ones helps them to better assess the needs of the community as a whole. (See Appendix B, Community and Church Networking Forms)

Sermons and Course Study

Next, this author preached a nine-week series of Sunday sermons and taught a nine-week course on Thursdays founded on those same sermons. This course study took place at the Community Church for Christ from March 4, 2001 to April 29, 2001. The purpose was to examine how God prepared Moses for his call to ministry through an in-depth look at the life and story of Moses.

On an average Sunday morning service 50-70 people attended during this course study. This included the 25% of this church's population that are children under 12 years of age.

Week One - *The Theology of Call*, John 21:1-19

David McKeithen, one of our professional associates and pastor of the Rockridge United Methodist Church of Oakland CA, preached the sermon.

Pastor McKeithen dealt with four points:

1. One must leave their comfort zone in order to answer their call.
2. The call is not based upon your confidence in yourself, but God's confidence in you.
3. When God calls someone, He has already made provisions for that person.
4. If we step out on faith, God will give us the unimaginable.

Week Two - *What breaks God's Heart?* Exodus 2:11-15

In this passage Moses is now an adult living in Egypt. One day he goes out to the labor fields to watch the Hebrew people hard at work. He witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave.

Something rises up inside of Moses to make him kill the Egyptian after looking around to see if there was anybody else watching. Moses then hides the dead man in the sand. The next day Moses returns to the fields only to find two Hebrew men fighting. He confronts the one he thinks is in the wrong with the question, “why are you hitting your brother?” The Hebrew man replies, “who made you judge and are you going to kill me like you killed that Egyptian man yesterday?” After Pharaoh gets the news, he tries to have Moses killed.

Four points were dealt with:

1. God does not make mistakes.
2. God gives us a piece of his heart.
3. Where you are is where God wants you to be.
4. Do you want to be of service to God?

Week Three - *Preparation For the Journey.* Exodus 2:15-22.

In this passage Moses escapes the wrath of Pharaoh, only to find himself on the backside of the desert in Midian. Due to his action, he gives up all possibilities of becoming the next Pharaoh of Egypt. While Moses is sitting by a well he finds himself fighting some shepherds on behalf of a priest named Jethro who has seven daughters. Jethro had sent his daughters out with his flock to make sure the flock had some water. The daughters were met by some shepherds who tried to run them away. Because of his courage the daughters brought Moses home to meet their father. Moses agrees to stay with Jethro and take one of his daughter's hands in marriage.

Four points were dealt with:

1. God does not make mistakes.
2. God gives us a piece of his heart.
3. Where you are is where God wants you to be.
4. Do you want to be of service to God?

Week Four - *When God Calls, You Answer* Exodus 3:1-10.

Moses is now tending to the flock of his father-in-law at the foot of the mountain called Horeb. Moses notices a bush on fire at the top of the mountain. Moses set out to see why the bush continues to burn. Out of the bush God calls Moses by his name and tells him to take off his shoes for the ground he stands on is holy. Here God tells Moses that He has heard the cries of his people in Egypt and He was sending Moses to bring the people out of Egypt. This is where Moses receives his call to service from God.

Five points were dealt with:

1. You must be broken and humbled before God can use you.
2. You cannot find God, God finds you.
3. God can call you from the same areas where you have been practicing.
4. What happens when you reject your call from God?
5. When God calls you, He says your name.

Week Five - *What's Your Excuse?* Exodus 3:11-12, 4:1-2, 4:10-14

After Moses receives his call to service from God he immediately begins to tell God that he has the wrong person. God assures Moses that He would be with him. Yet Moses insists on explaining to God how and why He has chosen the wrong man. Moses spends quite a bit of time trying to tell God that He has the wrong man. You will see in reading Chapter Four that Moses also spends a lot of time trying to convince God how

unqualified he is for the job. Moses also shares with God how bad his speech is. God gives Moses answers for all of his questions.

Four points were dealt with:

1. This is not your fight.
2. When you are overwhelmed by fear.
3. We walk by faith and not by sight.
4. The Lord will make a way.

Week Six - *You Are Not Alone.* Exodus 4:4-16

In this passage Moses wastes time with the excuses of why he could not have been the chosen one. Yet God waits for Moses to stop complaining about what he does not have and start using what he has. God informs Moses that he has already been equipped with everything that he will need. God also shares with Moses that He has prepared his brother Aaron to go along with him on the journey.

Three points were dealt with:

1. God always provides a witness.
2. We need each other.
3. God has a witness for you.

Week Seven - *It's Only A Test.* Exodus 5:22-23

After Moses and Aaron go down to Egypt and Moses tells Pharaoh to let his people go, God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh now makes the people suffer even more because of Moses' action. The people are forced to make bricks without straw because of Moses' challenge to Pharaoh's authority. The people's pain and suffering became worse than it had ever been before. Moses now goes back to God to question, why are the people receiving more punishment because of him.

Four points were dealt with:

1. After preparation comes the test.
2. Don't abandon the ship in a storm.
3. The test will come.
4. There is a promotion after the test.

Week Eight - *When God Hardens Pharaoh's Heart (Exodus 4:21).*

In this passage Moses and Aaron return to Egypt with orders from God to tell Pharaoh to let their people go. It appears that Moses is under the illusion that Pharaoh will turn those people over without a fight. However, the bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The ten plagues are to come shortly because Pharaoh was going to give freedom to the people that had been enslaved over 400 years ago.

Four points were dealt with:

1. God does not abandon you.
2. Stick to your assignment.
3. God knows how to use our enemy for our good.
4. God has it all in control.

Week Nine - *The Shock Wave of Delayed Deliverance (Exodus 7:1-5).*

God has prepared Moses to go before Pharaoh one more time and tell him that God said, let my people go. God now tells Moses that He will harden Pharaoh's heart. As a result of this process God tells Moses that He will lay his mighty hand upon the land of Egypt in judgment. After God lays his hand of judgment, the Egyptian will know that He is God. Then Moses leads God's people out of the land of Egypt.

Four points were dealt with:

1. God hardens Pharaoh's heart.
2. Someone may not be ready.
3. God is testing your faith.
4. There is promotion after the test.

Thursday Night Classes (Course Study)

Each Thursday night the class examined the previous Sunday's sermon for clarity and understanding. Students examined methods to apply the principles of Moses' call, in order to realize and understand what God may be calling individuals to do. The class shared stories and examples of personal applications of the sermon. A question and answer period occurred at the end of every session.

Following is the outline for the first Thursday night session. Each of the remaining nine sessions followed the same format. The same video was used each night to establish a foundation on one's life calling, examining passion, gifts and style. The group consistently discussed the sermon's subject and topic, thus creating the atmosphere for personal discovery of call. The audience size fluctuated between 11 – 20 people each week. Thursday night classes were open to anyone who desired to participate. Ten committee members who made up the core group volunteered to complete the course, therefore their attendance was mandatory. For others participation was not required.

Session Description:

Date: March 8, 2001

Duration of Session: 2 hours

Attendance: 20 participants - 12 female, 8 male

Format for the series: Lecture Interactive questions and answers, video viewing
 (*The Right People, In the Right Places for the Right Reasons*, Bruce Bugbee – 8 min videocassette)

Ground rules: Established the support needed

Discussion: Four Points from Sermon

The Minister's Four Steps to Life:

- Trust God
- Make it Simple
- Know how to recover
- Trust God

Questions from participants (to answer by end of course):

- How do you identify your calling?
- How will God prepare you for your calling?
- How do you know your calling has come?
- How to recognize your calling?
- What is your specific calling to service?
- When you get your calling, how do you maintain the strength to stay in it and continue to move forward with passion?
- Why me for that calling?
- What is the difference in a dream and passion?

Class discussion was exciting and energizing. People began to share their disbelief that Moses' life could be looked at from such a critical viewpoint. Most of the

class time was spent in discussion around the details of Moses' journey. Several people shared parallel stories of how their life also mirrors the course of Moses' journey. Others did not want to accept that one needs to be broken before God can fully use them.

On two occasions throughout the course series, the group split into several factions, according to their versions of what happened in the story of Moses. There was never a dull moment throughout the nine-week course study.

It appeared that the group began to clearly see how God used Moses through his passion for service. Participants were able to reflect upon their lives and conditions in that very moment only to discover that God was using them right where they were. Some of the members began to share stories that clarified their walk with God, realizing that joys and pains are a necessary part of God's plan for their lives. Knowing the two areas of call, which have been identified as Situational and Prophetic, most of the people began to look at their own situations and recognize where God might be calling them to serve. Romans 8:28 tell us "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to his purpose."

Service Responsibility (Convention)

On May 13, 2001 a convention was held at the Sunday morning worship service at the Community Church for Christ. There, session participants had the opportunity to share through testimonials what they had discovered during the nine-weeks of course study. They were able to sound the calls of what was felt to be their area of passion and what God had called them to do. They began to tell stories rooted in their common joys and pains. People from the community with whom session participants had been working during the One on Ones were also invited to share their joys, pains and how they could

live out their call to service. They began to share a piece of God's heart that He had given to them.

As a result of this convention, five people were able to sound their call. One sounded his call toward prison ministry, another to educate young people. One sounded the call for the homeless in the community, yet others sounded their calls for a safe house for prostitutes, assistance in providing the infrastructure to develop a faith-base organization and locating funding opportunities to help support the ministry. In addition to the sermons and classes, group members were motivated by their service responsibility. They were reminded of some of the joys and pain they had discussed earlier in their interview. Discussions were also held about the occurrence of certain activities in the community that were disturbing to us. This was a time when everyone was encouraged to come together to sound their call, talk about areas to work on and implement their call in the church.

Mission Covenant Group

Mission Covenant Groups (MCG) were formed to maintain some structure for those who felt a calling upon their life. Basically, these are like interests support groups within our community that will help those who follow their call to service. People joined the MCG in their areas of passion and where they felt they could be helpful. These groups meet at least twice a month.

MCG groups that were formed were: 1.Ex-Con, offering support to former offenders; Safehouse for Prostitutes, facilitating transition to a life change; Homelessness, with the goal to create a homeless shelter; and, the Millennium Ministries Group, a non-profit organization. The Ex-Con group has four members who have gone through prison

fellowship training to learn how to interact with inmates for a smoother transition upon exiting incarceration. They also have begun work on providing jobs for felons and are an encouragement for men to reconnect with society to build healthy families. The Safehouse for Prostitutes has two members, who both have at one time lived the life filled with prostitution and drug-use. They are now searching for a home within the community to become a safehouse for women who are seeking refuge from the street lifestyle. The members of Safehouse group walk the streets every Thursday evening, ministering to women caught in that lifestyle.

The homeless shelter committee has six members who feel that God has a calling upon their life to create shelter for the homeless. After the call was sounded in the convention, this group grew the fastest with people of the same passion. This MCG has found two houses and are in negotiations to begin this program for the homeless in the neighborhood. The plan is to have a shelter where one could get dinner and a place to sleep. Basically this facility would provide shelter just for the night.

The fourth MCG is the Millennium Ministries Group, incorporated on March 6, 2000 as a faith-based organization to provide community services to support underprivileged families and hard-to-reach populations requiring social, health and human services programs within the community. The MCG sought a grant from the State of California for a pilot project. It was the State's first time funding of a faith-based program. The Millennium Ministries Group (TMMG) received a grant in the amount of \$198,000 for the years 2000-2001 for job development training. TMMG is also seeking funding for the other mission covenant groups within the Community Church for Christ.

It feels its mission is to help the other MCGs sustain and secure funding to help fortify their calls to service.

These four MCGs are the start of many more to come. As we continue to empower people to develop and answer their call to service we feel that more MCGs will be added to the ministry.

Here we have included a description of some of the current ministries available at the Community Church for Christ.

The Millennium Ministries Group, Inc. (TMMG)

TMMG is a faith-based organization that provides community services to support under-privileged families and hard-to-reach populations. These are the communities that require a higher level of social, health and human services. TMMG, in collaboration with several churches and religious organizations, will provide community support services such as individual/spiritual counseling, marriage counseling, health services, education, job training, job development, job preparation, clothing/food distribution and referrals for housing.

Health Ministry

A health ministry was developed out of a need for the people in our community who do not have medical insurance. This clinic will provide HIV counseling and testing services. Health education, testing for colon and breast cancer and blood pressure screening will also be provided.

Job Development 2001

The job development program offers job training services such as: job training, job development skills, interviewing techniques, completing employment applications, creating resumes, and job searching. We track the progress of our clients for six months.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

My fieldwork started on March 1, 2001 and ended May 9, 2001 with a convention held on Sunday morning May 13, 2001.

This project began with a discussion about a new form of ministry for the twenty-first century. I began by asking the core group certain questions listed here to be investigated over the course study.

1. What is your analysis of the traditional church as we know it?
2. Why does it appear that the traditional church is dying?
3. What are we going to need to do to keep the church alive during the 21st century?
4. If you had one thing that you would like to change about the church what would it be?
5. If you had one thing that you liked about the traditional church what would it be?
6. Why do you come to church?
7. What makes a successful church today?
8. Who has a model of a successful church?

The attempt was made to establish an atmosphere that allowed everyone understand his or her value to the 21st century church. Everybody has a second call to service. We must help parishioner's to find out what that call is, and how they will live that call out within the body of Christ. By asking these questions I was able to formulate an understanding of where people were at the beginning of this project. People were required to take a look at their own situations. They were also given a chance to ask themselves, what piece of God's heart has He given to me and how do I live that out for

Him? Everyone agreed that people only come to church and join with a need. Even though the need ranges, the fact remains that anytime someone comes to Christ, they come with a need. The question then becomes, who meets the needs of the people who come to the church for help?

For every problem that people bring to the church there needs to be just as many ministries to address those problems. Without this form of ministry, the church as we know it will die. Therefore, the pastor or leader should create an atmosphere for multi-ministries. No one person has the “right” answers to address the needs of all the people who come through the door. Through this course study, my hope was to enlighten the participants that their calls are unique to the services they will be providing through this ministry. And the only way to answer a call is through service.

Points of interests will be highlighted in each discussion to help illuminate the framework for helping the core group to respond to their call to service. The objective of the course is to give the core group a realistic process of God’s plan for our lives and the steps that should be taken in order to fulfill his plan. We used the discussion groups each week to accomplish this.

The first Thursday night class was longer than the following sessions because we needed to set the ground rules and discuss the questions that the participants should be able to answer by the end of the course.

Week One - *The Theology Of Call*

During our first Thursday night class most of the people had some difficulty understanding the sermon preached by Pastor David McKeithen. Most of the class participants felt that the sermon was over their head. We then analyzed his four steps according to his message.

1. One must leave their comfort zone in order to answer their call.
 - The group agreed that one must leave their comfort zone to answer their call. However, they were unwilling to accept the responsibility of leaving that with which they were familiar to anticipate the unknown. We also agreed that outside of our comfort zone we are not depending on ourselves, but we are depending on the power of God. The core group agreed that they are not as productive in their comfort zone, but that they were not willing to become uncomfortable to answer their call. Basically, they did not want to be inconvenienced.
2. The call is not based upon your confidence in yourself, but God's confidence in you.
 - Pastor McKeithen's message gave us an example of God's confidence in him. Most of the class agreed that we didn't feel comfortable doing God's will within the limitations of our own knowledge. They asked the question, "How do we know how much confidence God has in us?" We agreed that we didn't understand God's picture for our lives, so we lacked confidence in what we thought God was leading us to do. We did not feel that we were 'ready'.
3. When God calls someone, He has already made provisions for him or her.
 - We learned that the right people would show up to help aid in the process when answering your call. Even if we don't have the expertise God will provide the resource.

4. If we step out on faith God will give us the unimaginable.
 - After listening to Pastor McKeithen's message we discussed that 'stepping out on faith' is more of a cliché than it is a step in the Christian walk. We agreed that we spend more time talking about faith than acting within faith.

Week Two - *What Breaks God's Heart*

This was the beginning of a series of messages where we looked at Moses' life chronologically to see how God prepared him for service. The group felt they understood a little better how you receive a call from God knowing that it breaks God's heart. We also agreed that a call to service would not be ushering in the church, or singing in the choir, but would be to provide service to areas and people where the circumstances that exist there break God's heart.

1. First, God does not make mistakes.
 - We discussed the tragedies of our times and in the world, such as starvation, death, illness, etc., to conclude that God has a plan and these things are not just happening on their own. We began to discuss our own personal lives and journeys and realized that this is all a part of God's plan for each and every one of our lives. Questions were asked about certain issues and incidents that happened in people's lives such as incest, rape, drugs, homelessness, hunger, etc., and whether or not these things were of God. Did God cause them to happen and why would God allow such terrible things to happen? We came to the conclusion that regardless of how it looks to us, God does not make mistakes.
2. God gives us a piece of his heart.
 - Here we discussed the joys and pains that we witness in society. We began to tell stories of the things that we see that bring us joy as well as those stories that bring us pain. And we discovered those things

were the piece of God's heart that He gives to us. We discovered the things that brought us pain, made us so uncomfortable that we had to do something about them. The things that brought us joy, we had a natural reaction of celebration and comfort. We talked about how it is easier to celebrate the joys, opposed to deciding how to respond appropriately to the pains. We discovered the joys and pains of life are the heart of God.

3. Where you are is where God wants you to be?

- This was one of the most powerful points of this course. God can use you right where you are. Even when you are born into a time where it appears that you are not supposed to live, God will make provisions for you to survive. This God does, in order for you to live out the call that He has prepared for you. It was difficult for some of the class participants to accept the hand that they were dealt by God. They described this hand as being unfair. They felt that they needed to be in a certain place or point in their life before God can use them.

4. Do you want to be of service to God?

- Everyone agreed that they wanted to be used by God but were not readily willing to accept the uncertainty of what God had placed before them. They wanted to be used by God in their comfort zones. We accepted that if you wanted to be used by God you have no control and you must surrender, not a portion, but all of your life to Him.

Week Three - Preparation For The Journey

We started the session by agreeing that everything we do has a preparation stage.

Another cliché that came up in this discussion was 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail'.

That was the groundwork for this class.

1. Are you running from the enemy or are you running toward God?

- There was plenty of laughter and joke/story telling around this first point. We realized that through those circumstances where we thought

we needed to run from our situations were actually times when God was bringing us closer to Him. We learned that God had not abandoned us. We also agreed that those were the times when God was getting our attention. God was forcing us toward Him.

2. You will respond to your call even when you are in the wrong places.
 - We discussed how we have been places where we knew we should not have been. God can use these places to reveal to us ways that we can answer our call to service. We agreed that God also uses those situations as opportunities for us to minister to others. Examples were shared describing how God has used us for his good even in the places where it appeared that God's purpose was the most removed. We concluded that there are no wrong places where God cannot use you for his good.
3. The same call that gets you in trouble can also get you out.
 - If following God's word gets you in trouble, then God will bring you out. We discussed our life's joys and pains realizing that having faith in God is what sustains us during those times of despair. Allowing God to work it out allows you to go through the storms knowing that our faith in God is what brings us through.
4. How do you survive in strange places?
 - We learned that being in strange situations is a part of the preparation. Strange places are avenues where God uses us in preparation for our call. The class understood that being in strange places does not mean that you are off course, but that they need to be embraced as part of God's preparation for you to live out your call.

Week Four - *When God Calls You Answer*

1. You must be broken and humbled before God can use you.
 - This point created controversy in the class because some of the core group felt that they did not want to be broken to be used by God. They felt that God could use them in their present state. The class became

noticeably divided on this issue and this division continued throughout the remainder of the nine-week course. A few of the members could not accept that being broken or humbled was a part of God's preparation for them in their call to service. We spent time talking about how we were born with a sinful nature, and in order for us to answer God's call we must surrender our sinful lifestyles. We cannot please God in our present state.

2. You cannot find God, God finds you.
 - The class all agreed that people so often describe how they found God. We agreed that God has never been lost. We discovered the steps that we take are steps toward God getting our attention. It became clear that when we come to ourselves, we come to God.
3. God can call you from the same area where you have been practicing.
 - The group agreed, after looking at the life of Moses and from the biblical stories of David and others that God never takes you out of the area where you have been practicing. Whatever area you have been practicing, God uses in preparation for your call to service.
4. What happens when you reject your call from God?
 - We all agreed that life is not lived to the fullest when we reject our calls. We also concluded that life is not purposeful, and there is a void.
5. When God calls you He calls you by your name.
 - We were able to conclude that when God communicates his purpose or mission for you, even in the midst of a crowd, He calls you by your name. We also concluded that God does not confuse our calls with the calls of others. God will specifically call you by your name to the area that you should be serving. We also recognize that when God calls us we will know that that calls belongs to us. To support this fact we referenced biblical characters such as Moses and Saul who later became Paul, who were both called by their names.

Week Five - *What's Your Excuse?*

We discussed the excuses that people give to not accomplish their goals. We agreed that this is a reason that we aren't as productive as we could be.

1. This is not your fight.
 - We came to the conclusion that when we are called by God we need to know that the battle is not ours, it is God's. We discussed how God takes small numbers to win big battles. We learned that a few plus God always equals the majority. We also discovered that when we are in spiritual warfare we are not fighting one another (flesh and blood) but we are fighting evil powers.
2. What not to do when we are overwhelmed by fear.
 - We used the analogy of being safer in the storm when you stick to God's plan, than you are when you try to deviate from God's plan and use your own resources. We learned that God is still in control even when fear and doubt becomes the order of the day.
3. We walk by faith and not by sight.
 - We discussed the importance of our faith-walk. A consensus was taken that the majority of us can't believe that which we cannot see. We also agreed that faith is the only way we are going to complete God's plan for our lives, even though we don't understand how He is going to get us there.
4. The Lord will make a way.
 - We discussed stories and examples of how God has made ways when we had given up. We also recognize that God's abilities are infinite, while ours are limited. If we stick to His plan we will be okay.

Week Six - *You Are Not Alone*

1. God always provides a witness.
 - We concluded that when God gives us an assignment there is always a witness than can collaborate our story no matter how far fetched it may seem to us. We recognize that the Bible always gives us a person who will corroborate our story. God has provided a witness for us in all areas of life, so that you will not have to worry about being alone in your journey of service in your area of call.
2. We need each other.
 - We discovered that all of us have different gifts and these gifts work together. We talked about how one person can't win God's battle alone. In this point we began to ask the question, who's helping us in the areas of our call? We began to listen to people who had like-minded stories of pains and joys so that we can work together on a common goal.
3. God has a witness for you.
 - We learned that God has placed someone there that He has prepared just for you to aid you along in your call to service. The group began to share stories of how that one person made the difference in their situations. We concluded that even though we can't identify that person going into our journey that they are always there to help us along the way

Week Seven - *It's Only A Test*

1. After preparation comes the test.
 - We looked at the tests that we have gone through and recognized how God has been preparing us all the time. Stories were shared of the amazing preparation process even when we did not recognize what was happening. We talked about the diversity of tests that we have overcome because of this preparation process.

2. Don't abandon the ship in a storm.
 - We talked about the times when we wanted to give up, but somehow we did not, we were able to hang on. We now understand that this was part of God's test. Realizing that it's always darkest before dawn, you must not abandon the ship when you think that it's about to sink. If you stick to God's plan, He will see you through.
3. The test will come.
 - We acknowledged that no matter how calm the waters, the storm is always on its way. We discussed how the timing is never convenient. We then began to share stories of the un-timeliness of the tests.

Week Eight - *When God Hardens Pharaoh's Heart*

1. God does not abandon you.
 - We began to examine why God would tell Moses to go to Pharaoh to demand the release of his people, while at the same time God is hardening Pharaoh's heart to not release the people of Egypt to Moses. We discovered that some things that God does, do not always seem logical to us. But that we must trust that God's plan is still at work through these times too.
2. Stick to your assignment.
 - We began to tell stories of how we wanted to change the plan when it appeared that our faith-walk was not getting us anywhere. We all agreed that sticking to the assignment; even in times of resistance from external forces is what God wants us to do.
3. God knows how to use your enemy for his good.
 - There was laughter and stories told around God using our enemies to keep us focused and encouraged. We agreed that we needed to thank God for our enemies, because our enemies keep us sharp and trusting in Him.

4. God has it all in control.

- We looked at the times in our lives that were full of chaos and confusion. We agreed that there is no panic in heaven and even when our situations seemed hopeless God was in charge.

Week Nine - *The Shock Wave of Delayed Deliverance*

Here we discussed what happens when deliverance is delayed. The time that it takes for God to deliver us is not determined by man's timetable. The cliché comes to mind states that, 'He may not come when you want or when you call Him but He's always on time'. The core group agreed that God does not work on our timetable. Most of us agreed that if it were up to us we wouldn't have been able to persevere but God always comes through for us in his own perfect time.

1. God hardens Pharaoh's heart

- Through the example of God hardening Pharaoh's heart we discussed how sometimes the opposition will hold up the goal that we are trying to accomplish. When things don't work according to our plan we must wait on God. We accepted that God uses these tests of patience as faith builders for his people.

2. Somebody may not be ready.

- God may hold up your blessing because of your associations. God may force you to work with someone or let go of someone before He delivers your blessing to you. Through this discussion we realized that we were not ready to provide service to our community because most of us had not accepted and put to use our second call.

3. God could be testing your faith

- God wants us to believe in Him and allow Him to use us for his purpose. Through the testing of our faith we agreed that God will provide deliverance as we have been shown through our own life's

journeys. We also agreed that the biggest piece of this project deals with having faith in God.

4. There is promotion after the test

- We recognized that after the initial call, the acknowledgement of our preparation and after the tests that we have overcome, God gives us victory through service. We agreed that we find peace in our heart. The promotion gives us energy. We also completed an exercise that we titled, "Vision, Valley, Victory". With every vision there is a valley. After every valley God gives us victory.

By the end of the course people had polarized into three separate groups. Study participants fell into three categories of outcomes: 1) the people who said, yes I have a calling on my life and this is how I'm going to live it out; 2) the people who said yes, I have a calling on my life and I'm not quite sure what God is calling me to do. However, I'm in prayer and waiting for my answer; and, 3) the people who refused to submit to God's plan stating that they didn't believe that God needed to break them before He uses them. They felt that if God wanted to use them He would use them just as they were.

The participants who fell into the first group were Subjects 1 through 5. They now all understand their second call to service and feel they know how they want to live out that call.

Subject 1 spent three terms in prison and therefore feels a call to the ex-con ministry. Subject 1 feels that God has saved him to become a light in the darkness for those without hope. He tells the story of how hard it is for felons to get a job because no one is willing to trust them. He has sounded his call to the church and is now actively working in that area.

Subject 2 feels that she has a call to provide technical support to ministries that need structure and order. Subject 2 is now conducting workshops and seminars to help others realize what it is they want to do in ministry. She is also writing grants that will provide supportive services to the different ministries.

Subject 3 feels that she has a call to teach Christian education to children. Less than two years ago Subject 3 felt the need to start a private school to educate the students who were not doing well in the public school system. She feels that Christian education teaches morals and values. Her school started with one in-home student. Today it serves 50 students at the Community Church for Christ.

Subject 4 feels that she has a call to care for and provide housing for prostitutes. After a decade of drugs and prostitution herself she feels that God is sending her back to the street in a different capacity to provide sanctuary for those who are still out there. Subject 4 is now gathering information and resources to help her team hit the streets.

Subject 5 feels that he has a call to provide and run a shelter for the homeless. Subject 5 lives two blocks away from the church so he sees people who sleep on the streets and under the bridges in our neighborhood. He is seeking a location to feed the homeless a hot meal and give them shelter for the night.

The second group, Subjects 6, 7 and 8, all believe they have a call, but are not sure to what specific area they are being called. This group, in my opinion, will not have long to wait before they nail down their specific areas of call.

Subject 6 feels that his call is in the area of medical service. God is already using Subject 6 in the service of health. He spends most of his time helping people with their

health problems. Whether the issue is eating right or taking the proper medications to get better, Subject 6 has that concern on his heart.

Subject 7 feels that she is being called to the area of social justice. She is not sure how she is going to fulfill her call in this area. Subject 7 is currently a student seeking to enhance her knowledge in this area where she feels that God is calling her to service.

Subject 8 feels that he has a call to service but does not know what that call is. Subject 8 grew up a devout Muslim. He has been a Christian for less than six months. He is a single parent searching for his niche in life. Subject 8 feels the need to be helpful whenever there is a need. He is a very hard worker and I feel that as he continues to grow, Subject 8 will find what God is calling them to do.

The last group, Subjects 9 and 10, struggled with the sermons and some of the methods used in this course surrounding call. They are both very gifted with talent. In the classes they disagreed with the discussion addressed to being broken. They argued the point that one does not have to be broken to serve God. They feel that their talent should be a substitute for the calling that God has on their life to service. Of all the groups that participated in this course this was the only group that did not accept the course methodology on realizing and fulfilling their second call

In summary, I believe the study of Moses helped us to take an investigative look into the total process of answering our call to service.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

My father was the pastor of the church in which I grew up. Church has always been a part of my life. Theology was a common word in our household. The only definition I knew for theology was that it was ‘the study of God.’ For years I never questioned nor explored that definition. In my young adult years, I began to question the childhood explanation given to me of theology. The answer always remained the same, just ‘the study of God.’ As a child, I was not allowed to do what philosophy calls ‘beg the question’ about theology. I accepted the answer given, but in my heart I knew there was much more to this concept that needed to be explored.

Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe have a segment in their book, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* entitled “Love The Questions” which discusses our reasons for reading the Bible, stemming from our need to seek answers to questions within us. The authors continue to say that we need to have an organized approach and method in our search to receive the responses to our questions.⁴²

Formal seminary training has helped to broaden my understanding of the true meaning of theology. After years of searching for answers I now know without a shadow of a doubt that there is much more meaning to this word than I understood as a youth. Dr. Robert Linthicum shared, “When I was a seminary student thirty years ago, I was

⁴² Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 36.

impressed by a professor who defined theological inquiry in a way I had never heard it articulated before. He said, ‘Students should always remember that theology is a verb, not a noun.’ In essence he was saying that theology is a process not a product. It is faith in search of understanding.”⁴³ God can be looked at from varied points of view. God can be defined by who and what he is to you and his personage will vary according to each individual’s life experiences.

At United Theological Seminary, I participated in a theological foundations class where a professor, Dr. Dozeman, spoke about theology from a Christian’s perspective. He said, “It is critical for the Christian to reflect upon what he or she believes about God, what God did, and how that can be interpreted through them.” This also resonates Dr. Linthicum’s view.

In Deuteronomy, God imparted his law to humankind. This law was to be used as a guide to live by. People, through their obedience to it, would find themselves pleasing in the sight of God. But intending to alter God’s plans and live independent of Him, they found themselves falling short of the Master’s plan. Being omnipotent, God understood that people would not abide in His instructions and so provided them a second chance through his son, Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”⁴⁴ This, Jesus tells his disciples, is the basis upon which his church shall be built.

Not only did Jesus come as a living example but also as a redeemer for all people. The Bible states, “Greater love has no one, that he will lay down his life for his

⁴³ Robert C. Linthicum, *City of God City of Satan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 23.

⁴⁴ John 3:16 (NIV)

friends.”⁴⁵ He came as the ultimate sacrifice to reunite man with God. This act has given us the opportunity to live out the plan God has established for each of our lives.

Simply stated, from the foundation of time, God has had a perfect plan. Humanity was created for a purpose. Matthew 28:19-20⁴⁶ also known as the “Great Commission” states, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, son and of the Holy Spirit: And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you: and surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.” These are the instructions for the church. We must also understand to whom this call is directed.

To gain a greater understanding, we will need to answer several questions. What is the church? Who is the church? Where is the church? In the Greek New Testament the word for church is “ekklesia” literally meaning, “the called out ones.” Walter A. Elwell, author of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology*,⁴⁷ broaches the subject by drawing three general conclusions: First, ekklesia predominantly refers to a local assembly of those who profess faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ. Secondly, the ekklesia designates the universal church as found in the book of Acts and the latter Pauline letters to the church at Ephesus. Lastly, the ekklesia refers to God’s congregation as evidenced in both the first and second books of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians.

I have been in the church practically all of my life, and for the past ten years I have been a pastor. Only now am I looking at new approaches to ministry. The idea of collaboration and partnership has taken our focus to new heights in ministry. It gives us

⁴⁵ John 15:13 (NIV)

⁴⁶ Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

⁴⁷ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 261.

the ability to help a wider range of people while allowing each group to use their gifts or expertise to aid in the development of the ministry itself.

This doctoral studies program has completely broadened my scope of ministry. The feedback from our peer group sessions have challenged and inspired us to continue our quest to provide the help that is so desperately needed in our inner city neighborhood.

Community organizing has proven to be the best model I have yet to encounter. It takes the “grass roots” approach; meeting the people right where they are. Dr. Linthicum states,

There is a profound difference between being a church in or to an urban neighborhood, and being a church with its neighborhood. When a church takes this third approach, it incarnates itself in that community. The church becomes flesh of the people’s flesh and bones of the people’s bones. It enters into the life of that community and it becomes partners with it, addressing its needs. It becomes an entity that identifies with the people and it respects those same people and perceives them as being people of great wisdom and potential.⁴⁸

A community-organized group by the name of the Chicago Vida Project has produced advocacy using organization and educational videos to aid activist groups in their approach to community organizing over the years. This group has produced over eighty video presentations for nearly forty different organizations. One of its most recognized projects was entitled, “*The Democratic Promise*, ”⁴⁹ narrated by Alec Baldwin. As shown in the video, the legendary organizer, Saul Alinsky, championed new ways to organize the poor and the powerless to create a “backyard revolution” in cities across America. His work has influenced both the struggle for civil rights as well as the

⁴⁸ Robert C. Lithicum, *Empowering the Poor* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Books World Vision, 2000), 23.

⁴⁹ *The Democratic Promise: Saul Alinsky & His Legacy*, Dir. Bob Hercules & Bruce Orenstein, 56 min., ITVS, 1999, videocassette.

farm workers movement. In 1970, Time magazine hailed Alinsky as being a “prophet of power to the people” and argued that Alinsky’s idea had forever changed the way American democracy works.⁵⁰

The video presents great examples of community organizing models in action. While watching, I began to see simple organizing principles and their effectiveness. I felt the energy of “ordinary people” of the inner cities of Brooklyn, New York and Dallas, Texas. It can be done.

To deal with what I term the “parishioners call,” I would like to incorporate the models I have examined. In most churches the pastor and pastoral staff are the only people seen to have a vocation from God. I believe every child of God is called upon to help build His kingdom. How we fulfill that call will determine our effectiveness as Christians. If the parishioners of our churches would answer their call, I believe the church would become a stronger force within the community it serves. We all have spiritual gifts and these gifts are to be used for the edification of the body of Christ.

I believe if the church continues to use the simple methods for urban ministry noted in this paper, we will find that the statistics listed at the opening of this paper would greatly diminish. I am determined to do my part to assist in the greater work set before all of God’s churches. An African proverb states, “It takes a village to raise a child.” My thoughts relating to the inner city maladies is simply, it takes a partnership of churches to raise the inner city communities to the standards they once were, bright, colorful, thriving places of hope and future, spreading itself throughout the world.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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Oakland Police Department / Crime Statistics / Beat 06X

crime
statisticsgeneral
information**Beat 06X**crime
prevention**North** 40th Street from Hwy 980 W/B from the Emeryville City border**South** West Grand Avenue from San Pablo Avenue W/B to Hwy 980youth
services**East** Hwy 980 from West Grand Avenue to 40th Street**West** San Pablo Avenue from West Grand Avenue to the Emeryville City border; continuing N/B on the Emeryville border to 40th Streetcareer
information

2000	187PC	209PC	211PC A	211PC S/A	212PC	215 PC	245PC	261PC	273.5PC	451PC	459PC C	459PC R	459PC L/A	10851VC
January	1		9	7			12				3	16	29	31
February			3	2			4				2	3	11	13
March			3	2			6					6	8	9
April	1		3	2		1	4					1	2	5
May			2	1		1	6				2	5	6	5
June				1			1					7	3	6
July														
August														
September														
October														
November														
December														

KEY
 187PC M
 209PC K
 211PC A
 211PC S/
 212PC R
 215PC C
 245PC A/
 261PC R
 273.5PC
 451PC A
 459PC C
 459PC R
 459PC L/
 10851 S

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Oakland Police Department / Crime Statistics / Beat 07X

crime
statisticsgeneral
information**Beat 07X**crime
prevention**North** Emeryville City border W/B from San Pablo Avenue to the San Francisco Bay**South** West Grand Avenue W/B from San Pablo Avenue to the San Francisco / Oakland Bay Bridgeyouth
services**East** San Pablo Avenue from West Grand Avenue to the Emeryville City border**West** San Francisco Baycareer
information

2000	187PC	209PC	211PC A	211PC S/A	212PC	215 PC	245PC	261PC	273.5PC	451PC	459PC C	459PC R	459PC L/A	108.51VC
January	1		4	3	2	3	14				1	12	18	24
February	1		2	2			7					4	5	6
March				1			3				1	1	8	10
April			1	1	1	1	11				2	4	5	1
May				2			2				1	3	9	9
June	2			1			6					4	2	8
July														
August														
September														
October														
November														
December														

KEY
 187PC M
 209PC K
 211PC A
 211PC S/
 212PC R
 215PC C
 245PC A
 261PC R
 273.5PC
 451PC A
 459PC C
 459PC R
 459PC L/
 108.51 S

COMMUNITY NETWORKING FORM

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Length of Stay in Community: _____ Number in Family: _____

Occupation or Identification: _____

Greatest Joy in Living/Working in Community: _____

Deepest Need/Issue of Community: _____

Other Neighborhood/City Problems: _____

Gatekeepers Identified: _____

Caretakers: _____

Flak-Catchers: _____

Brokers: _____

Names of People This Person Suggested Visiting (include address, phone number): _____

Would the Person Visited Work in Community Action: _____

Name of Person Preparing Report: _____

CHURCH NETWORKING FORM

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Length of Stay in Church: _____ (In Community?: _____)

Number in Family: _____ Living at Home: _____

Family Currently in Church (Names): _____

Occupation or Identification: _____

How does this congregation shape this person? _____

Greatest Joy/Pride in Church: _____

Deepest Need/Issue in Congregation: _____

Deepest Need/Issue in the Community: _____

Church Gatekeepers: _____

Caretakers: _____

Flak-Catchers: _____

Brokers: _____

Names of People This Person Suggested Visiting (include address, phone number)

Would the Person Visited Work in Community Action: _____

Name of Person Preparing Report: _____

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